

CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT AND THE WEAPONS OF OUR WARFARE

INTRODUCTION

- While the seeds for the destruction of our nation were sown long ago, we have witnessed the moral implosion of our society dramatically in the last couple of years
- We have seen the unraveling of the family unit, the redefinition of marriage, the abandonment of gender as defined by God, the disregard for a biblical sexual ethic, and the largely wholesale absence of the fear of God in our society
- Most likely, it is the presence of believers and solid churches in the US that act as a restraining influence to some degree, preventing the unraveling of the very moral fabric of our society from happening even faster
- Christians have a preserving effect on the world, preventing mankind from devolving into utter moral corruption and ruin and acting like something of a moral antiseptic
- Negatively, their presence in society retards wickedness because their life is a reproach to the sin of those they are around
- Positively, believers bring out what is good in society, manifesting the virtues that have a beneficial effect on the world

Matthew 5:13-16 ~ You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. 14 You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; 15 nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. 16 Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

1 Corinthians 7:12-14 ~ But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her. 13 And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not send her husband away. 14 For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy.

- However, the preserving effect of believers will continue to be diluted by an increasingly corrupt culture
- Added to this national moral freefall is opposition against believers which continues to mount in our society, functioning as a harbinger of increased persecution which will likely come
- As believers, we should expect such treatment from the world since Christ promised us that, just as He was hated by the world, we will as well

John 15:18-20 ~ If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. 19 If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. 20 Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also.

- "If you live in a democratic, secularized society, you will not be tortured, killed, or put in a concentration camp. But you will be discriminated against, verbally ridiculed, threatened with lawsuits, or labeled an intolerant bigot. Your neighbors may not want to associate with you or even speak to you. You may be accused of 'misinterpreting Jesus's beautiful message of love, tolerance, inclusivism, social justice, and

world peace.’ As our Western societies become more godless and secularized, expect opposition to escalate...A new, more aggressive, hostile secularism has emerged in recent years. Proponents of this new, militant secularism are intolerant of historic Christian teaching. They are determined to silence biblical Christianity by even passing laws that will criminalize certain Christian beliefs.”¹

- So, how should we as believers engage an increasingly immoral and hostile culture?

VARIOUS VIEWS ON CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT

Cultural Transformationalism

- This view, also known as neo-Kuyperianism (after Dutch theologian and politician Abraham Kuyper) and evangelical transformationalism, posits that every square inch of this world belongs to Christ
- Therefore, His influence and lordship should be felt in every part of society, from politics to the arts to education to the marketplace
- They hold that the work of Christ was not just to redeem individuals sinners but also to renew all of creation
- As such, we should be at work to change the world and transform the culture by engaging the social and political structures of society
- Some key tenets underly this philosophy of cultural engagement:²
 1. It is based on the idea that God intends to redeem, not just sinners, but all creation at least in part during the present age – it aims at a re-created society
 2. It is based on the belief that God’s mission and the church’s mission are the same
 - “The so-called *missio Dei*, the idea that God desires to redeem all creation, is the basis for understanding the church’s mission in transformationalist thinking.”
 - “Christ is presently ruling all things as King, they argue, and it is part of the mission of the church to extend that rule into all spheres of society, including culture. They love to quote Abraham Kuyper’s well-known statement, “There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over *all*, does not cry: ‘Mine!’” in support of their view.”
- There are some positives to this view:³
 1. They desire to make their faith public
 2. They have a zeal to confront injustice and help the hurting
 3. They have an appreciation for the goodness of the created world
 4. They take seriously that Christianity is about more than sinners getting their ticket punched for heaven
- And it is true that believers can (and perhaps should) at times advocate for the good of a society by seeking to engage it and transform it
- Especially in a society that allows its citizens to participate in a process of making their views known, they can take full advantage of those legal and political opportunities
- “Even unbelievers, when they act consistent with that order, can do what God has blessed them to do—they can preserve order and justice in the world, they devise successful political systems, they can produce worthy art, and they can teach things that are true. And so, in these kinds of activities, God’s people can

¹ Alexander Strauch, *Acts 20: Fierce Wolves Are Coming – Guard the Flock*, 44-45.

² Adapted from Scott Aniol, *Citizens and Exiles: Christians, the Church, and Culture*, https://g3min.org/library-resources/citizens-and-exiles/#_ftn6

³ Adapted from Kevin DeYoung, *Two Kingdom Theology and Neo-Kuyperians*, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/two-kingdom-theology-and-neo-kuyperians/>

stand alongside unbelieving people, participating in and contributing to society as citizens of the Universal common kingdom of God.”⁴

- A prime example of this is what Jeremiah said to Israel in exile in Babylon

Jeremiah 29:4-7 ~ Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon, 5 ‘Build houses and live in them; and plant gardens and eat their produce. 6 Take wives and become the fathers of sons and daughters, and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; and multiply there and do not decrease. 7 Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf; for in its welfare you will have welfare.’

- “Despite the absolute religious antithesis as members of God’s redeemed people, there was much commonality between the everyday lives of the Hebrews and the everyday lives of the Babylonians with respect to the common kingdom—building houses, planting gardens, family, governing, literature, and education.”⁵
- So, believers are “in the world,” residents of this place that we temporarily call home
- As such we do our best to promote the welfare of the city, because its welfare is also our welfare
- We pray for our leaders

1 Timothy 2:1-2 ~ First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, 2 for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity.

- We pray for healthy governments that protect the innocent and punish injustice, even if they are pagan

Romans 13:3-4 ~ For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; 4 for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.

- And as residents of this world (with our citizenship in heaven), we submit to and honor earthly authorities

Romans 13:1 ~ Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.

1 Peter 2:13-14 ~ Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, 14 or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right.

- Clearly, there is some value in considering what it means to be a “resident alien”
- “There is a real sense in which Christians, analogous to Israel in exile, are dual citizens—resident aliens. Christians are first and foremost citizens of the redemptive kingdom, but they are also citizens of God’s Universal common Kingdom along with every other human being. And thus, Christians contribute to society, submit to and pray for governmental authorities, and participate in various aspects of cultural endeavors, as long as they reflect and remain consistent with God’s law.”⁶
- However, a number of problems exist within this approach toward culture:
 1. “An individual Christian’s role in society is not connected directly in any way to God’s plan to establish his united kingdom on earth and restore all things. When a Christian acts in society, it is not out of a

⁴ Anirol, https://g3min.org/library-resources/citizens-and-exiles/#_ftn6

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

motivation to ‘redeem culture.’ Only the ‘Last Adam’ can perfectly fill the role God intended as King/Priest who exercises perfect dominion over all, and this will occur when he comes again.”⁷

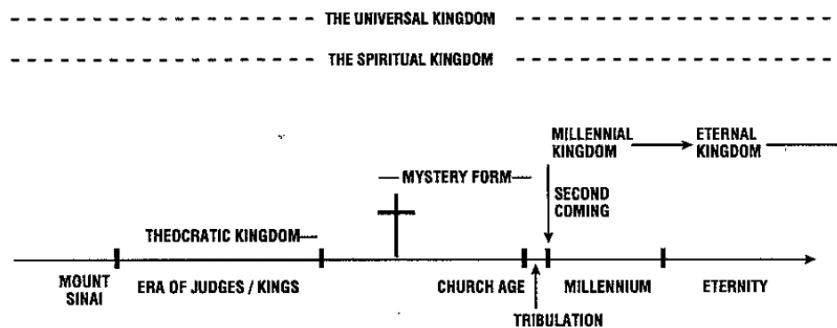
2. Clear, direct biblical support for commanding Christians to change the world or transform the culture is very slim
3. It blurs the line between common grace and special grace
4. It can devolve quickly into simply moralism and/or utopian idealism
5. It can often resort to mere political means of accomplishing its purposes
6. It can lead to theonomy, which aims for the institution of a Christianized form of government where society is ruled by divine law (particularly the judicial laws of the OT)
7. It argues for a militant church to bring in the kingdom now (a “realized, inaugurated eschatology”) and understands the NT church to be “an initial manifestation” of the coming kingdom, thus mandating that the church participates in God’s plan to redeem all things

- So, perhaps there is a better understanding concerning how believers are to engage society

Two Kingdom Theology

- Those who hold to this view of cultural engagement believe in a kingdom of this world and a kingdom of Christ
- We possess a dual citizenship as believers, living as citizens of both God’s universal kingdom and God’s spiritual kingdom...awaiting the arrival of His earthly kingdom which is still future

VARIOUS ASPECTS OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD



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- God’s universal kingdom consists of His absolute sovereign control over all creation from heaven at all times
- The kingdom of God is wherever He reigns...and since He is the Creator of all things and reigns everywhere, the kingdom of God is everywhere
- His kingdom spans the entire universe in that no area of the universe is exempt from God’s control
- There has been no time when God’s dominion over His creation has been lost
- In this kingdom, nothing happens outside of the will of God because He is sovereign and in control
- And, whether they like it or not, every single person is under the rule of the universal kingdom
- Also, in the universal kingdom, God rules directly...with no human mediator ruling on His behalf

Psalm 24:1 ~ The earth is the LORD’S, and all it contains, The world, and those who dwell in it.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Paul Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy*, 145.

Psalm 103:19 ~ The LORD has established His throne in the heavens, And His sovereignty rules over all.

Psalm 145:13 ~ Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, And Your dominion endures throughout all generations.

- There is also a spiritual kingdom, the rule of God over all the redeemed for all time
- Anyone from Adam until now who has been born again is part of the kingdom of God's redeemed
- This kingdom does not include all humankind...it includes only those who place their faith in Him

Matthew 13:38 ~ ...these are the sons of the kingdom...

John 3:3 ~ Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Colossians 1:13 ~ For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son

- Thus, two kingdoms have existed concurrently since the beginning of creation: a universal kingdom (involving God's superintendence over all things)...and a redemptive kingdom (God's specific rule over His redeemed people)
- However, at this present time, these two kingdoms are distinct, not presently united
- We are still praying for and anticipating the day when God unites them into one kingdom, the day when the actual, physical, earthly kingdom of God arrives
- That coming kingdom, where the kingdom of this world and the kingdom of Christ are united, has 2 phases:
 - Phase #1 – The millennial kingdom of God is when the Messiah reigns on this present earth in order to fulfill completely the promises given to Israel in the OT
 - Phase #2 – The eternal state is when God reigns over a new heaven and earth that is free from opposition to His rule...as it was at the beginning of creation

Matthew 6:10 ~ your kingdom come

- That kingdom has not arrived yet as we are still awaiting the time when these two kingdoms will be perfectly united
- "Christ preached this kingdom while he is on earth, and he promised that it will come. But this concrete, literal kingdom that unites the Universal common kingdom with the Redemptive kingdom, according to Christ in John 18:36 "is not of this world"—that union is not a present reality. It will happen only after Jesus comes again, when "the kingdom of the world"—that is, the common kingdom—"will become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ" (Rev 11:15)."⁹
- "In other words, since the united universal redemptive kingdom will not again be established on earth until after the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, the union of socio-cultural spheres and the redemptive sphere will not take place until that future kingdom. Presently, the two kingdoms exist separately from one another; one day in the future, these two kingdoms will be united into one kingdom. When that kingdom comes, God will fully redeem his people, the Second Adam will take his place as the perfect King/Priest over all creation, he will fully unite the Universal kingdom with the Redemptive kingdom, and in fact he will restore all of creation (Isa 65:17, 21–25)."¹⁰
- Reminders from Sunday's sermon about the kingdom that is to come:
 1. It is a future kingdom
 2. It is an earthly kingdom

⁹ Anioli, https://g3min.org/library-resources/citizens-and-exiles/#_ftn6

¹⁰ Ibid.

3. It is a glorious kingdom
4. It is a millennial kingdom
5. It is an eternal kingdom

- The fact that God's universal kingdom (including all people) and His redeemed kingdom (with only believers) are not yet united keeps us from trying to force God's kingdom to come now by attempts at cultural transformation
- "Living in the tension of two kingdoms we should stop trying to transform the culture of this world into the kingdom of our Lord and instead focus on the church being the church, led by it duly ordained officers and ministering through the ordinary means of grace."¹¹
- This understanding acknowledges that, while Christians can do and should do many worthwhile things in the world, the church as church has a more specific and eternal mandate

THE WEAPONS OF OUR WARFARE

- So how should we as believers engage this culture?

Keep the Mission of the Church Central

- On the one hand, it is appropriate for Christians to do what they can to encourage the making and enforcing of laws which address societal issues, using all legislative means available to them, etc.
- On the other hand, we must not forget the core mission of the church as described in the New Testament:

1) Exalt God

Psalm 95:6 ~ Come, let us worship and bow down, Let us kneel before the LORD our Maker.

2) Equip the Saints

Ephesians 4:12 ~ for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ

3) Edify One Another

Romans 14:19 ~ So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.

4) Evangelize the Lost

Matthew 28:19-20 ~ Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

- These are the primary mandates of the church and the apostles recognized these priorities:

Acts 6:4 ~ But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word

- Addressing issues in our society like oppression, abortion, racism, sex trafficking, transgenderism, homosexuality, etc. are not unimportant issues but they are secondary

¹¹ DeYoung, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/two-kingdom-theology-and-neo-kuyperians/>

- Making these issues primary causes the church to lose its focus and leads to mission drift
- “Anybody, any group, can put new clothes on a man. Only the gospel can put a new man in clothes. As important as these matters are, we must make sure we keep the main thing the main thing – the gospel of grace and forgiveness through Jesus Christ, the authority of the Word of God, and the call for humble obedience – even in the face of ethnic and cultural differences and problems.”¹²
- “Bottom line: let’s work for change where God calls us and gifts us, but let’s not forget that the Great Commission is go into the world and make disciples, not go into the world and build the kingdom.”¹³
- “In other words, a biblical philosophy of culture does not understand a church’s role toward culture to be in terms of cultural redemption, the *missio Dei*, ‘work for the kingdom,’ the ‘cultural mandate,’ or any missiological or eschatological motivation. Rather, we should view the church’s exclusive mission as one of evangelization and discipling Christians to live sanctified lives in whatever cultural sphere God has called them. This is the extent of the church’s so-called ‘responsibility’ toward culture, and anything more than this threatens to sideline the church’s central mission.”¹⁴

Take Thoughts Captive

2 Corinthians 10:1-6 ~ Now I, Paul, myself urge you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—I who am meek when face to face with you, but bold toward you when absent! 2 I ask that when I am present I need not be bold with the confidence with which I propose to be courageous against some, who regard us as if we walked according to the flesh. 3 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, 4 for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. 5 We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, 6 and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete.

- In confronting false teachers in Corinth, Paul describes the primary weapons he used in spiritual battle with the world

Compassion

- In v. 1, Paul manifested “the meekness and gentleness of Christ” in dealing with his opponents
- Instead of seeking personal vengeance on his enemies, he showed them the same patience that Christ showed him
- They accused him of being “meek when face to face” and “bold...when absent”...in other words, they accused him of being a wimp in person and bold when absent
- But the allegations were not true...Paul proved it is possible to be a bold warrior for the truth, while at the same time being compassionate
- We must also manifest the same compassion when dealing with the world and its opposition to us

Courage

- In v. 2, Paul affirmed that he could be courageous when standing for the truth
- When it came to defending the truth, he was absolutely fearless and would be bold if necessary

¹² H.B. Charles, “The Biblical Strategy for Racial Unity” in *A Biblical Answer for Racial Unity*, 2017, 24.

¹³ DeYoung, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/two-kingdom-theology-and-neo-kuyperians/>

¹⁴ Aniol, https://g3min.org/library-resources/citizens-and-exiles/#_ftn6

- We must also be bold if necessary to stand for the truth in this culture...But how?

Confrontation

- From v. 3, it is clear that Paul understood how to do engage those who opposed him
- V. 3 constitutes a play on words...in v. 2, he was accused of being “in the flesh”...i.e. corrupt, immoral, greedy, etc.
- In v. 3, he affirmed that he was “in the flesh” in the physical sense...i.e. that he was human, a clay pot
- But he did not “war according to the flesh,” namely he did not go to war using human weapons
- The weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh...we don’t fight this spiritual battle we are in with human weapons...not human ingenuity, not with worldly wisdom, not with clever methodologies....those weapons are not able to successfully oppose Satan’s assaults
- Our weapons are not human...because the war is spiritual
- To fight a spiritual war requires weapons from the heavenly arsenal...v. 4 ~ for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses
- Our weapons are spiritual weapons...and those weapons are mighty, powerful weapons
- We don’t fight and go to battle with Satan with mere human weapons, but with powerful, spiritual weapons
- Only those are able to destroy “fortresses”...that’s how formidable Satan’s lies and worldly philosophies are
- Satan has in essence erected strongholds which serve as citadels of his lies...bastions of his false ideologies
- Paul refers to such false beliefs as “speculation” (v. 5 - *logismos*)
- They are any idea, theory, viewpoint, religion, concept, lie, or anything else that is raised up against the knowledge of God
- They are godless ideologies which take men captive
- That’s how Satan wages war in this world...he attacks the mind...he works through worldly philosophies that capture people
- Paul is not referring to engaging actual demons in spiritual warfare...but rather a battle against false ideologies that ensnare the world
- “Doomed souls are inside their fortresses of ideas, which become their prisons and eventually their tombs – unless they are delivered from them by belief in the truth...Like Paul, before salvation, all unbelievers have a fortress in which they attempt to hide from the true knowledge of God. Those fortresses take endless forms in philosophy, psychology, world religions, cults, apostate forms of Christianity, or evolutionary naturalism...This and all the other deceptive and deadly ideologies must be destroyed and the incarcerated sinners rescued.”¹⁵
- But these false ways of thinking cannot be addressed with human weapons...fleshly weapons are useless in that kind of combat
- The spiritual strongholds manned by the forces of hell can be demolished only by the “sword of the Spirit”
- Only the truth of God’s Word can defeat Satanic falsehoods because the only thing that displaces error is truth
- The only thing that smashes what is raised up against the knowledge of God is the true knowledge of God’s Word

¹⁵ John MacArthur, 2 *Corinthians*, 329-330.

- So, the way we engage culture is not by trying to moralize it, but rather lovingly and graciously confronting individuals with the Gospel
- The objective of our warfare is to change how people think
- This is what is involved in “taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” (v. 5)
- It is to make it no longer captive to ideologies and philosophies which are damning
- This is how believers primarily deal with a hostile culture...by using God’s truth and His Gospel to smash enemy fortresses to the ground and bring them to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ
- “The key to being successful in spiritual warfare is becoming proficient at wielding the sword of the Word of God against the lies people believe. It is impossible to fight error without knowing the truth. Just as soldiers train constantly in the use of their weapons, so also must Christian soldiers constantly study the Scriptures. Only the power of God’s truth can smash the lies of satanic false systems.”¹⁶
- We must do this winsomely, graciously, patiently, and kindly, trusting that the Lord will lead some to repentance and out of the snare of the devil

2 Timothy 2:24-26 ~ The Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, 25 with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, 26 and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.

¹⁶ Ibid., 331.